CLAIMS

1. An agent for preventing and healing constipation, containing a hydrogel of a polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid possessing a spherical or ovaloid shape having a short diameter in the range of 1 - 10 mm and an aspect ratio (long diameter/short diameter) in the range of 1 - 2.5.

2. An agent according to claim 1, wherein said hydrogel of a polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid is obtained by dropping an aqueous solution of sodium alginate into an aqueous solution of a polyvalent metal salt.

3. An agent according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein said hydrogel of a polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid has a degree of crosslinking in the range of 30 - 90%.

4. An agent according to any of claims 1 - 3, wherein said polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid is calcium alginate.

5. An agent according to any of claims 1 - 3, wherein the particles of said polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid are stored in water and/or a hydrogel compound of a natural compound possessing a free acid group capable of reacting with and sequestering a basic compound.

6. An agent according to claim 5, wherein the molecular weight of said natural compound is not less than 10,000.

7. An agent according to claim 6, wherein said acid group is carboxyl group or sulfuric acid group.

8. An agent according to claim 5, wherein said natural compound is at least one member selected from the group consisting of alginic acid, pectin, polydextrose, chondroitin sulfuric acid, and carageenin.

9. An agent according to any of claims 5 - 8, wherein the hydrogel of said natural compound contains an activated carbon in an amount in the range of 1 - 90 mass%.

10. An agent according to any of claims 5 - 9, wherein

the volume ratio of said hydrogel of a polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid/water or said natural substance is in the range of 2 : 1 - 1 : 2.

11. A method for the production of an agent for preventing and healing constipation containing a hydrogel of a polyvalent metal salt of alginic acid, comprising the steps of dropping an aqueous solution of sodium alginate into an aqueous solution of a polyvalent metal salt and subsequently washing the resultant solution with water.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the concentration of the aqueous solution of sodium alginate is in the range of 0.002 - 5 mass% and the concentration of the polyvalent metal salt is in the range of 1 - 10 mass%.

13. A method according to claim 11 or claim 12, wherein the amount of the aqueous solution of sodium alginate to be dropped is in the range of 0.1 - 5 ml/drop.

14. A method according to any of claims 11 - 13, wherein said aqueous solution of sodium alginate is dropped through a nozzle having the inside diameter of the leading terminal part thereof in the range of 0.1 - 5 mm.